

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

TO ALL INTERESTED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND PUBLIC GROUPS:

In accordance with the environmental review guidelines of the Council on Environmental Quality found at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 1500, and with the use of the implementing environmental review procedures of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found at 40 CFR Part 6 entitled "Procedures for Implementing the Requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality on the National Environmental Policy Act" as guidance, the EPA has performed an environmental review of the following proposed action:

Wastewater Construction Project
proposed by the City of Laredo
located in Webb County, Texas

EPA Project Number: C-48196101-09

Estimated EPA Share: \$ 1,408,000

Estimated Local Share: \$ 1,152,000

The Fiscal Year 1995 Appropriations Act for the EPA included special Congressional funding for water and wastewater construction projects. The City of Laredo (City) was selected to receive funding support through these special appropriations for the construction of approximately 15,286 linear feet of new wastewater collection lines in that portion of the Chacon Creek watershed located between the Laredo International Airport and Lake Casa Blanca to the east of the City. This particular area was selected for improved wastewater collection service since it represents approximately one-third of the developed area in the City, and the existing collection system is experiencing operational problems. During periods of peak usage, the existing lift stations and collection lines become overloaded with excessive flow. This condition causes overflows at manholes and sewage backups into homes.

The current project is Phase 2 of improved wastewater collection in this area, and will expand earlier efforts in the area. The initial portion of the overall project completed in 1996 involved the construction of a new raw water intake structure to supply additional water from the Rio Grande to the Jefferson Street wastewater treatment plant. Phase 1 of the overall project completed in 1999 involved the construction of approximately 45,300 linear feet of new collection line to transport flows to the Southside wastewater treatment plant. Upon completion, the overall project is expected to serve the wastewater collection needs of the population in the area through the year 2025. The City will utilize special Congressional funding support in conjunction with local funds to finance the construction.

The environmental review process, which is documented by the enclosed Environmental Assessment, indicates that no potential significant adverse environmental impacts are anticipated from the proposed action. The project individually, cumulatively over time, or in conjunction with other actions is not expected to have a significant adverse effect on the quality of the environment. On the basis of the environmental review determination that there are not any predicted or cumulative significant adverse impacts expected with the project, I have determined that the project is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary. My preliminary decision is based upon the enclosed Environmental Assessment, a careful review of the Environmental Information Document prepared for the project, the results of the public participation process, and other supporting data which are on file in the office listed below and available for public review upon request. Therefore, I am issuing this preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact pertaining to the project.

Comments regarding my preliminary decision may be submitted for consideration to the attention of the Office of Planning and Coordination (6EN-XP), Environmental Protection Agency, 1445 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75202-2733. After evaluating any comments received, the EPA will make a final decision. No administrative action will be taken on this preliminary decision for at least 30 calendar days after release of this Finding of No Significant Impact. The preliminary decision and finding will then become final after the 30-day comment period expires if no new significant information is provided to alter this finding.

Responsible Official,

John Blevins
Director
Compliance Assurance and
Enforcement Division

Enclosure

cc: Raul Salinas, Mayor
City of Laredo

Kevin Ward, Executive Administrator
Texas Water Development Board

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

WASTEWATER CONSTRUCTION PROJECT
proposed by the
CITY of LAREDO
located in
WEBB COUNTY, TEXAS

BACKGROUND

The City of Laredo (City) is located on the north bank of the Rio Grande adjacent to the border with Mexico, and is the largest city in Webb County. Recent increases in population and industry have caused increased demands for public services such as utilities, water supply, and wastewater treatment. The City has proposed the construction of approximately 15,286 linear feet of new interceptor sewer lines to serve the wastewater collection needs in the area of the Chacon Creek watershed located between the Laredo International Airport and nearby Lake Casa Blanca. This particular area was selected for improved wastewater collection service since it represents approximately one-third of the developed area in the City, and the existing collection system is experiencing operational problems. During periods of peak usage, the existing lift stations and collection lines become overloaded with excessive flow. This condition causes overflows at manholes and sewage backups into homes. The proposed collection lines are shown on the map enclosed as Figure 1.

The current project is the second phase of improved wastewater collection in this area. The initial portion of the overall project completed in 1996 involved the construction of a new raw water intake structure to supply additional water from the Rio Grande to the Jefferson Street wastewater treatment plant. Phase 1 of the overall project completed in 1999 involved the construction of approximately 45,300 linear feet of new collection line to transport flows to the Southside wastewater treatment plant, and eliminated 17 existing lift stations. The elimination of these lift stations provided increased flow capacity to the collection system. The current Phase 2 of the overall project will further expand wastewater collection in the area, and is expected to increase capacity again by eliminating additional lift stations. Additional flows from the new lines will be transported to the Southside treatment plant. Upon completion, the overall project is expected to serve the wastewater collection needs of the population in the area through the year 2025, which is estimated to be approximately 340,422 people. The City will utilize special Congressional funding support in conjunction with local funds to finance the proposed project.

The proposed project is considered to be a Federal action requiring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In accordance with the environmental review requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality found at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 1500, and with the use of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) implementing regulations found at 40 CFR Part 6 entitled "Procedures for Implementing the Requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality on the National Environmental Policy Act" as guidance, the EPA is preparing this Environmental Assessment to assist in determining the environmental impacts of the proposed action, and in evaluating whether an Environmental

Impact Statement or a Finding of No Significant Impact will be prepared for the proposed project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The City will construct approximately 15,286 linear feet of new wastewater collection lines primarily following existing rights-of-way. The corridor will be less than 100 feet wide, and the lines will be buried at a depth ranging from 5 to 20 feet below the surface through open cut trenching as follows:

1. 6,170 feet of 30-inch line;
2. 3,013 feet of 24-inch line;
3. 3,667 feet of 21-inch line;
4. 2,067 feet of 18-inch line; and
5. 369 feet of 8-inch line.

The first portion of the line work will begin at the intersection of US Highway 59 and Casa Blanca Road, and will end at Loop 20. This portion will include boring under Loop 20 in four locations. The second and separate portion of the line work will begin at US Highway 59, and will end at Loop 20. The improvements will not require the purchase of new land or displace any existing citizen, home or business. The project will provide a safe and dependable wastewater collection system to prevent continued contamination of the environment in the area, and will serve existing and future growth in this area of the City.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The funding recipient evaluated and considered a range of various alternatives to address the infrastructure needs of the area. Important factors influencing the evaluation of the processes and their recommended solutions include environmental acceptability, overall costs, availability of land for the intended uses, maximum reuse of existing facilities when applicable, operation and maintenance costs, system reliability, accommodation of future expansion needs, and public acceptance. A complete description of the alternatives is provided in the Environmental Information Document developed and provided by the funding recipient for the project.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The City is located approximately midway between Del Rio to the north and Brownsville to the south. The terrain is characterized by gently rolling plains located in an area known as the South Texas Plains Ecological Area. The land surface slopes toward the Rio Grande with elevations ranging between 400 feet to 330 feet above sea level. The climate is arid to semi-arid with average temperatures ranging from 43 degrees Fahrenheit in winter to 98 degrees in summer. The average annual precipitation is 19 inches per year with the majority of the rainfall occurring May through October. The prevailing winds are from the southeast and highest in the spring. The City obtains water from the river for municipal, industrial, and agricultural purposes. Surface water is impounded in nearby Lake Casa Blanca, which is used for recreation

and irrigation. The supply of usable ground water in the area is limited because much of it is too saline for domestic use.

IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project was analyzed to identify potential short-term, long-term, and cumulative impacts on the environment. There are no anticipated significant adverse environmental impacts associated with the proposed action that cannot be reduced to acceptable levels as identified and discussed below.

1. Biological Resources Including Threatened and Endangered Species: Based upon coordination with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to biological resources.
2. Cultural/Historic Resources: Based upon the results of individual and specific archeological surveys conducted in the project area, the recommendation that an archeological survey be conducted for the entire project area prior to construction, and coordination with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to archaeological, historical, architectural or cultural resources. If cultural materials are encountered during construction, work will stop immediately in the general area of the discovery, and the funding recipient will immediately notify the SHPO of the discovery.
3. Floodplain: Based upon coordination with the local Floodplain Administrator, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to the floodplain.
4. Wetlands: Based upon coordination with the United States Army Corps of Engineers, construction activities will not require the issuance of a project-specific permit, but will be covered under Nationwide Permit 12 for utility line activities. Compliance with the requirements of the general nationwide permit will ensure that construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to wetlands.

In order to further protect the natural beneficial functions of the floodplain and wetlands, and to minimize the potential flood hazards to life and property, the construction funding is conditioned to read:

a. The recipient agrees not to collect or treat wastewater generated by new development in the floodplain or wetlands by the project facilities for a period of 50 years from the date of the environmental assessment related to this project. This restriction does not apply to development in the floodplain or wetlands which existed prior to that date;

b. The recipient agrees to adopt and enforce suitable ordinances and implementing procedures for effective local administration of this floodplain and wetlands service area

restriction. On application of the recipient's governing body and after considering all relevant information on a proposed development's effects on the natural functions and values of the affected floodplain and wetlands, the EPA Regional Administrator may waive the service area restriction in individual cases; and

c. EPA and the recipient intend that this floodplain and wetlands service area restriction shall benefit any person, organization, or entity possessing an interest in preservation of the natural environment in the 100-year floodplain and wetlands subject to this restriction. Any such beneficiary may seek enforcement of the restriction against the recipient or its successor in a court of competent jurisdiction, if notice of the intent to seek enforcement is first given to the recipient and the EPA Region 6, and neither entity initiates corrective action within 90 days of receiving such notice.

5. Surface Water Resources: Based upon coordination with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to surface water resources.

6. Ground Water Resources: Based upon coordination with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to ground water resources.

7. Prime and Unique Farmlands: Based upon coordination with the Natural Resource Conservation Service, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to prime or unique farmlands.

8. Air Quality: Based upon coordination with the EPA Region 6 Air Planning Section, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to air quality.

9. Environmental Justice: The project was reviewed to ensure that construction will be conducted in an appropriate manner so that all persons and populations are served equally by the infrastructure improvements. Based upon the results of an evaluation to rank the potential environmental impacts to local communities using a computer-assisted mathematical formula, including Geographical Information System maps and census demographic data, no persons or populations will be discriminated against or denied the benefits of the proposed project. Since all persons and populations will be served equally by the project, there will be no adverse impacts that are considered disproportionate to any particular portion of the population.

10. Coastal and Barrier Resources: Since the project location is inland and not adjacent to any coastal location, construction of the proposed project should not have significant adverse impacts to coastal and barrier resources.

11. Cumulative Impacts: Potential cumulative impacts would be those impacts to the local environment that would result from the proposed project in combination with other ongoing actions, and those reasonably foreseeable future actions. No other major construction activity is

being conducted presently or planned for the immediate future. The proposed project will not individually nor cumulatively over time have a negative impact on the quality of the human or natural environment.

DOCUMENTATION, COORDINATION, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A public hearing for the proposed project was held on July 17, 2006, at the Laredo City Council Chambers. The purpose of the meeting was to inform the public of the proposed project, to identify any concerns, and to request public participation. No public comments or concerns were received during the hearing.

During the process of conducting the environmental review and preparing this Environmental Assessment for the project, coordination has been conducted with all required resource protection agencies and offices to solicit and incorporate their initial review and comments. Copies of this Environmental Assessment will be provided to those agencies and offices for their final review and comments. Other interested parties may request a copy of the Environmental Assessment in writing from the EPA, Office of Planning and Coordination (6EN-XP), 1445 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75202-2733.

References

1. Supplemental Environmental Information Document, Chacon Creek Wastewater Interceptor, City of Laredo, February 2006.

RECOMMENDATION

Based upon completion of this Environmental Assessment, and a detailed review of the Environmental Information Document for the project, it has been determined that construction activities are considered to be environmentally sound. Therefore, it is recommended that a Finding of No Significant Impact be issued for this project.